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Protestant Defence Alliance
of Canada

The Indians of the Lake
of Two Mountains

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THE
INDIANS OF THE LAKE OF TWO MOUNTAINS

AND THE
SEMINARY OF ST. SULPICE.



THE OKA CHURCH AS IT WAS.

The pulling down of the little church of the Indians of the Lake of Two Mountains, in their village of Oka, at the instance of the priests of the Seminary of St. Sulpice, has strongly roused the feelings of the people of this Dominion, and, as a consequence, much enquiry is made for a narrative of the facts of the case. To meet this very natural desire, and to direct public

action in the matter, the following statement has been prepared for circulation by request of the Protestant Defence Association, and is believed to give a correct representation of the questions involved, as between the Indians and those who should have been their protectors, but have become their oppressors.

In the early part of the last century the priests of the Seminary had a mission of Christian Indians, chiefly from the Iroquois and Algonquin tribes, on the Island of Montreal; but, judging it better to be farther removed from the white people, they applied to the King of France for the seigniory of the Lake of Two Mountains, to which they undertook to remove the Indians, and, by the building of a fort, to take the necessary precautions for their protection. They obtained the grant of the seigniory, as desired, in 1718; and it is to be observed that this grant was not to the Sulpicians as such, but in the capacity of missionaries to the Indians, who were at the time recognized as a distinct nationality, and as valuable allies of the French people and government. Subsequently, in 1735, they asked for and obtained an adjoining seigniory, stating, as reasons for their application, that the first grant had not remunerated them for their outlay, and that the Indians needed considerable space to range through, doubtless referring to their desire for hunting. This second application was successful, but they were obviously installed as seigniors with special reference to their mission to these Indians.

After the conquest of Canada, the purpose was entertained by the British Government to confiscate all the properties held by the Sulpicians, the Recollets and the Jesuits; and the Receiver-General was directed to have schedules drawn up of the landed estates of these religious communities, that they should not be transferred, or by sequestration or alienation be lost to the crown. The object was to make of them a fund for the purposes of education generally; though there is no reason to believe that it was intended to dispossess the Indians of the lands held by them. This would have been altogether contrary

to the usual policy of the British Government. Action, however, was fully taken only on the estates of the Jesuits; the other orders were allowed to retain their property. No legal titles were, however, given to these properties; the occupants were merely left in possession.

Matters remained in this state till 1841, when the Seminary was so far successful, in consequence of peculiar services rendered, or supposed to be rendered, by it to the Crown, during the rebellion of 1837-8, as to obtain the confirmation of its titles to the immense properties which it held,—without, however, any modification of those titles, whether with reference to the Indians, or to the support of education and of the poor. Within a few years, however, the Seminary endeavoured to get rid of a part of these obligations, and to become absolute owner of the Seigniory of Two Mountains, by inducing the government of the day to set apart 1,600 acres of land, in the Township of Doncaster, to the north of Montreal, to which the Indians were to be removed; the Seminary thus purposing to remain as absolute owner of the lands which were originally obtained rather for the Indians than for its own use. That this arrangement was improvident and unjust, there can be no doubt, unless it can be maintained that it was in the interest of the Indians, which does not seem to have been the case. But the Indians having refused to remove from the place of their birth and of the burial of their fathers, conflicts at once commenced between them and the Seminary,—the latter desiring to expel the Indians, and the Indians showing a determination not to be expelled.

As these conflicts continued, they naturally destroyed the confidence of the poor people of Oka in the rectitude and sincerity of their spiritual guides; and, accordingly, the Indians, in 1868, resolved, at once and finally, to abandon the Church of Rome, and to use such means as they believed they could legally employ, to cause the priests to leave the place and Seigniory altogether. At this period, a Methodist Mission was commenced among them, the success of which still more exasperated the

priests against the Indians. The former then commenced, and have continued, a series of petty persecutions and curtailments by litigation of the privileges which the Indians had, from time immemorial, enjoyed; the obvious intention being to assert absolute proprietorship on the part of the Seminary even over the ground used by the Indians, and to make their further residence impossible. The Seminary being wealthy, and its agents astute, and the surrounding districts occupied almost entirely by a Roman Catholic population, it was of course able to place the Indians in the position of wrong-doers, and to make their condition almost intolerable; while it affected to be pursuing a moderate and legal course.

When the mission was commenced by the Methodists, a small house was purchased from an Indian, which was at once fitted up for a school and a place for religious services. But it was much too small; and, hence, preparations were soon made for building a little church. For this purpose a site was purchased by the Chiefs from an Indian—a piece of ground which had been in the possession of Indians for over sixty years, and a deed was regularly drawn and duly enregistered. Means were then supplied by supporters of the mission to put up the church, which in all cost about twelve hundred dollars. It was a simple and unpretending edifice, but sufficiently commodious, and was naturally an object of honest pride and affection to the poor people who listened to the preaching of Gospel truth within its walls, and experienced there the consolations of a better faith than that of Rome. Gentlemen living on the opposite side of the lake, feeling a deep interest in these Indians, and glad to see the marked change in their moral tone and general conduct, procured for them a bell, at an additional expense of about one hundred and fifty dollars.

So soon as it became apparent to the priests that the Indians purposed the erection of a church, they entered an action against the chiefs for trespass. This action the chiefs were aided in resisting; but, owing to various circumstances, the details of which cannot be entered into here, it lingered before

the courts till last October; and, indeed, previous to that time, it was understood that the case of the Seminary had, for the time at least, been withdrawn. It was, however, brought up again in October, and in such a way as to prevent the counsel engaged for the Indians from putting in his defence. The result was what has been termed a "snap" judgment, on which it would be premature to hazard any opinion, as the whole circumstances will probably have to be judicially inquired into. The judgment was promptly acted on in the entire demolition of the church, and removal of its material, by a band of men under the direction of the Sheriff. It is to the credit of the Indians and their advisers, that they abstained from any demonstration of the feelings which this sacrilegious outrage must have excited, and meekly witnessed the tearing down of their little sanctuary in a land that had belonged to their fathers, and, where at once the tradition of the devotion of their ancestors to the fortunes of the settlers of New France, and the vaunted protection of all creeds by the free flag of Britain, should have protected them in the exercise of their religion, and allowed them space for their little church in the domain reserved for their use.

We would express no opinion as to the legality of the decision of the Court, or as to the manner in which it was carried out. Of its moral aspect, however, there can be no question. In that respect, it was an outrage against all the better feelings of humanity, of which any nation may well feel ashamed, and which is in no respect palliated by the circumstance that the victims were the too often ill-treated aborigines of our country, or that their religious creed was different from that of the majority of the inhabitants of the Province of Quebec. Both were considerations which should have stayed the hands of the persecutors, and which, even on the grounds of good taste and right feeling, would have prevented men of ordinary susceptibilities from committing themselves in the presence of the world to such acts. That these considerations had no effect on the minds of the gentlemen of the Seminary, shows, to say the least, how very unfit these men are to be entrusted with any

guardianship of the unprotected. It is to be observed, also, that this crowning outrage was only the culminating act of a long series of injuries inflicted on these unfortunate people, and that the Sulpicians have generally been regarded as more moderate and less extreme in ultramontaniam than the Jesuits, who are now nearly supreme in the councils of the hierarchy of the Province of Quebec.

The practical question remains,—What can be done to redress the wrongs of the sufferers, to execute justice on the oppressors, and to vindicate the outraged character of Canada as a Christian nation. The act has created wide-spread indignation, and has called forth reprobation from people of every class and creed wherever it has been made known; and it has led to an extensive awakening of the popular mind against those aggressions of the new creed of Vaticanism which are no where more severely felt at present than in the Province of Quebec, and which threaten, if not soon arrested, to invade the civil rights of our people to such an extent that the most serious consequences to the peace and prosperity of Canada may be dreaded. All this is well, but it does not fully meet the requirements of the case. It seems necessary, in the first place, to test the legal rights of the Indians as against the claims of the Seminary fully and effectually; and this not merely in relation to the recent outrage, but to the whole tenure of the lands in question from the first. It seems also necessary that the government should exercise its right, under the original ordinance on which the Seminary holds, to inquire fully into its management, and to ascertain whether its domain has been prudently and economically administered, and for the sole benefit of the Indians, as originally intended; and if any malversation can be detected, the Seminary should be obliged to make ample reparation, and, if necessary, the administration of the property should be transferred to a public trust—a course for which there are precedents in many Roman Catholic countries abroad. Lastly, if it is found that improvident or interested legislation has actually taken these lands from their

rightful owners and given the Seminary proprietary rights, then, on every principle of justice, the general government is bound to repay to the Indians their full value, or to cause the Government of Quebec to do so ; and if this injustice proceeds from any direct action of the Imperial Government, its liability should be enforced by every possible means.

With reference to each and all of these measures, every friend of civil and religious liberty can and should aid, not merely by contributing to the necessary fund for the defence of the Indians, but by bringing to bear upon the Government such a force of public opinion as shall make it imperative to have justice done, at whatever expense of indignation on the part of the ecclesiastics who wield so disastrous a sway in Quebec, but whose power, owing to this and other acts of injustice and impolicy, may even now be reaching a critical point, whence, if resisted with spirit and energy, its fall may be rapid and terrible. Let every one who may receive this statement consider, as before God, the searcher of hearts, how he may help the good cause of liberty and justice.



AS IT IS.

"Subscriptions and Donations for the Protestant Defence Alliance thankfully received by the Secretary, W. Geo Beers, P.O. Drawer 357, Montreal. Amounts will be acknowledged by the Treasurer's receipt."

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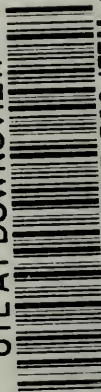
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